

Partial undated manuscript entitled
“Segment II – Bright College Years”
by George Swetnam (1904 – 1999)

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Segment II -- Bright College Years

Chapter 1 -- Columbia

After the family breakup, Mother, Walter and I stayed on for the summer of 1922 in the big house at the school at Whitesburg. Nobody else was ready to move in, and it seems to be one of the perquisites of the previous year's teaching. We had a good garden, and I was beginning to get more returns from my writing for the engineering and mechanical magazines. I think Walter was selling some things, too.

Almost immediately Mother suffered a severe breakdown, with continued and copious uterine bleeding. We provided what we could in the line of invalid care, and began planning for our education. Through a Christian Endeavor Society formed at Owen's suggestion we met Wilkes Dendy, who was planning to enter Columbia Theological Seminary, and wrote for a catalog. It was a Presbyterian school and we were "Campbellites" (members of the Disciples of Christ) but we had attended all sorts of churches as we grew up, and were not much denominationally inclined. In addition, it accepted students of any denomination, and charged no tuition. And we were delighted to see it offered Hebrew, which ^{interested} ~~delighted~~ us, seeming a very exotic language.

I had also written to Ernest's old school, Johnson Bible College, near Knoxville. Ernest, before dropping out, had done a great deal of work, on the farm and teaching in its academy. They agreed to honor this, which would pay ~~###~~ tuition, board and room for me for three semesters, but Walter liked Columbia and I decided to go along with him.

Columbia 2

Walter had long since felt the call, Paul's "Woe is me if I preach not the gospel;" though he didn't talk much about it. I never did and never have, but preaching seemed like a good profession, and within reach.

Columbia was essentially a graduate school, but since some presbyteries sent men with very little education, there were no entrance requirements. After a little correspondence we were accepted.

Classes were to begin about Sept. 20, but Walter and I went over a couple of weeks early, to find a place for Mother, who had become a little better. Shirley came ~~here~~^{hers} to look after her and get her on the train. Walter and I stayed at the YMCA, and I suffered a brief bout (a few days) of dengue, or "breakbone fever," carried by mosquitoes, which was epidemic at the moment. Walter found and rented a small house four miles from Columbia on a trolley line. There was a Lutheran seminary within about three blocks, but for some reason we never thought of going over and perhaps enrolling there instead.

When we showed up at Columbia Seminary the admissions professor, noting that we hadn't been to college and knew no Greek -- a requirement for the course in New Testament Greek interpretation -- assumed we only wanted (as some did) to take the English course, but we ~~#####~~ opted for Hebrew, too, which later proved to have been a momentous choice.

The weather in Columbia was usually very good til~~l~~^d February, which, after all, lasted only 28 days. We ordinarily walked in for classes (which were all before noon) until a student whose grandfather owned about half the town, gave me several books of

tickets issued by a predecessor of the trolley firm. He said they would be honored, and sure enough they were. We used them mostly when we were in a hurry, or when it was raining.

Mother had saved up about \$1,000 and Walter had about \$800 and I maybe \$500, so we were able to get along financially. The other "seminites", most of them college graduates, were friendly, but looked on us as some sort of backwoodsmen. We finished the first year's work with unprecedentedly high grades in Hebrew and high grades in everything else except mine in theology. This was strict Calvinism, right out of the Westminster Confession of Faith and Larger and Shorter Catechisms, and because I had dared to argue with the professor during the first semester I scraped by with a bare passing 75. By the second semester I was wiser, and my grade came up accordingly.

By the summer of 1923 Shirley (whose husband was preaching in an Atlanta suburb) was expecting a baby, so all three of us headed back for Georgia, Mother to keep an eye on Shirley, and Walter and I to look for jobs.

Jobs were scarce in the post-World War depression. I got my first preaching assignment, one Sunday at Red Oak Christian church, walking the five miles both ways, and being paid 50¢, which was probably twice what the sermon was worth. Father was in town and he wangled jobs for himself, Ernest, ~~Ernest, Walter and me~~, ~~Walter and me~~ Walter and me, selling World Book on commission, with a \$25 weekly drawing account.

For about six or seven weeks we rambled around North Georgia in Father's and Ernest's Model T Fords, trying to sell teachers

on World Book and the project method of teaching. I sold one set, to a woman who had taught me in sixth grade at Jenkinsburg. I think Walter sold two or three, at \$15.95 commission. Father did pretty well, and Ernest not too badly. But it became evident that things weren't going to work out satisfactorily for us or the company. The drawing account was supposed to be a loan, but Father worked out an agreement by which he paid back the full difference between that and his commissions, Ernest half the difference, and Walter and I # nothing.

But shortly before this, Ernest, Walter and I had a serious talk in our hotel room in Americus. Ernest, who was principal in the school at Suwannee and preaching at several churches, had been disillusioned with our denomination, and leaned towards the Methodist Episcopal. All through the year's work at Columbia Walter and I had been feeling much the same way, but inclined to the Presbyterian. After a long talk that night in Americus we decided it was time for action and shook hands on it. Ernest went back to Suwannee and he and his family joined the Methodist church. That fall he was received into the North Georgia Conference, and he continued to preach happily in it till his death 58 years later.

Walter and I told the family of our decision -- not without some hassling -- and were starting to look for summer work when we were offered an unusual proposition: Owen and his friend, Judge T. A. Hathcock, felt we hadn't had the opportunity to know their church well enough. He offered to pay our expenses, tuition, room and board at a summer school being taught by an evangelist, John W. Tyndale, at Milligan College, near Johnson City, Tenn.

We didn't think it would work, but with nothing else to do we went along with it.

As to the purpose for which we were sent, the school proved a blast. Tyndale, who claimed descent from the Tyndale who made an early translation of the Bible into English, proved to be a big-mouthed ignoramus who had some very wild ideas about religion. The other faculty member was his brother-in-law who taught English grammar and was also a wild-eyed preacher. We could not find more than a couple of even decently educated people among the students, gathered somehow from the deep South and Southwest.

One of Tyndale's wild ideas was that where a word could be found with or twisted into a meaning that suited their purpose, it meant the same thing everywhere. For instance, when Jesus told the thief: "Tonight thou shalt be with me in Paradise," Paradise meant "hell," because the creed said Jesus descended into Hell. Therefore, everywhere in the King James Bible where the word paradise was found it meant Hell.

Our arrival must have created some stir, for it was quickly evident that they were out to show us up as being beneath them. When we went to the first grammar class, they gave each of us a Bible verse to diagram on the blackboard. Mine, as I recall, wasn't too difficult, but this David (I can't recall his last name) gave Walter one of Paul's long, rambling sentences taking up three or four verses in Colossians, as I recall.

We had been trained from childhood in English grammar, and Walter was an expert. It took a while and covered the whole board, but he finished it in style. David announced that class time was up, that Walter was wrong, and he would show the mistake at the

next meeting of the class. The grammar class was dropped before the next time it was supposed to meet.

One of their regular features was a general meeting in the auditorium on Sunday night, with a speaker or a debate on some topic of religion -- or at least theology. I challenged David, who was the big debater, on the question of whether the thief on the cross was saved, and we met the next Sunday night. Judge Hathcock, who had come up for a visit, was one of the judges, and I lost a two to one decision. Since the other judges were Tyndale and one of his henchmen I was surprised it wasn't unanimous. After the meeting ended the judge came over and consoled me, but he didn't say a word about not changing churches. Incidentally, that was the last debate.

About that time Walter and I quit showing up for any of the school functions. We had a good time roving the area and climbing Buffalo Mountain, but it was a very important summer for us, too. Somewhere Walter had found a Huddleston's New Testament Greek Grammar, and I had bought a Goodwin's Greek Grammar, classical, but very complete. We had borrowed Ernest's Greek New Testament, and we dug in on those in every spare minute. We had no lexicon, but learned the Greek words by using the New Testament (which we both knew well from childhood) as a "pony."

By the time Tyndale's school closed and we went back to Columbia we were so proficient in New Testament Greek that we asked and got permission to try the regular Middle Year Greek course and also the one we had missed the previous year, which fortunately came at an open hour. We kept digging on the courses, and

by Christmas were the principal student authorities in both classes of Greek forms, especially those of some irregular verbs, which can become quite difficult.

Mother had stayed in Atlanta with Shirley and Owen, who took their defeat on our change pretty well. Incidentally, we found out later from Mother that the Hathcock business was a pious fraud. Owen, who for one of the few times in his career was making a decent salary, had cooked it up and paid the \$100, which was all it cost. I paid it back at a time when they were really hard up.

On our return to Columbia we had joined ~~Wass~~ ^{Wass} Hill Presbyterian Church, and were received as candidates by Congaree Presbytery, which made us eligible for scholarships, which could be (and was) paid back later by preaching for under \$1,400 a year. We stayed in a two-room suite in the dormitory, and did most of our studying before breakfast, setting the alarm clock for 4 a. m.

We were still pretty green in some ways, knew little or nothing of college life, and had never seen or heard (we heard our first radio broadcast that fall) a football game. But we had learned to play tennis pretty well, learned volleyball and "hot hand," and fit into school life pretty well. We met a few girls from Chicora College, across the street, and Walter fell head-over heels in love with Lois Hudson, a missionary's daughter who was going to The University of South Carolina, a few blocks away.

That was a good year. We not only did Greek with flying colors and knocked the top off Hebrew again, but did well in other studies. We enrolled in a second-semester course in Social Psychology at USC, which had a free student exchange relationship with the seminary, and passed it well though it was supposed to be limited to graduate students.

With spring came the search for summer work. The seminary found a summer supply preaching place for Walter in Florida, but was doing nothing for me, perhaps figuring that at barely twenty I was too young. But in the church paper, Christian Observer, I found a small ad for a preacher for a large country church near Augusta, Kentucky. Advertising for a preacher or a job was simply not done in that day, but I answered it and became a summer supply from May to September at \$25 a week, the going rate. And since there was no boarding place in reach, I was given free board and room for two weeks at a time in homes of the congregation, which was equivalent to another \$25 a month.

That was another delightful summer. Sharon was in the horse country, and I enjoyed going to the fairs, and at a department store in Augusta that had radio I got to hear some of both major party national conventions. I must have done a pretty fair job, for at the end of the summer they wanted to call me as pastor on graduation. But by that time I was firmly determined to get my B. A. degree, a requirement for the B. D. I was earning at Columbia.

Back at school Walter met with a shock. He knew Lois liked him and would probably accept him if he proposed; and all summer, on the theory that nothing ever happens as you expect, he tried to envision everything that could come between them. The one thing he hadn't thought of was what had happened: Lois had developed what was then called dementia praecox. Now it would require just a few months of treatment. Then she became a mental invalid for life.

~~Back at school~~ That fall we moved into a more satisfactory suite and on every night before an advanced Hebrew class was to meet, a dozen of our fellow seniors would gather there, and we would explain and drill them on the assignment. I'll bet that our prof, Edsar "Eggs" Kerr, never had such a good class. I know I made a killing ^{with him} when I recognized that the word "hishta^{kh}avitha" was a methasesized hithpa'el of "shakha."

I was also given \$100 for opening the library twice a week and seeing that nobody carried off the treasures, which were many,

although I doubt if there were three in our class who could have recognized them. It was a lonely job, and rummaging around in the attic # I found the original minutes of the board which set up the Seminary in 1828. Columbia Seminary was getting ready to move to Decatur, GA, and the heirs of the Smyth family, which according to tradition had given the property on condition that it would revert if it ceased to be used for the purpose, were suing for its return.

Columbia had a new president who was rather a friend of mine, and I showed him the record, which plainly showed that the trustees had refused that offer, voting instead to pay \$15,000 for the property which included a large four-block space and the former state governor's mansion. No one had previously known of the existence of the record. Several months after I had graduated my friend wrote me that when it was presented at a preliminary hearing, the Smyth heirs immediately dropped their suit.

Walter and I both took courses at USC that year, entering by examination, though neither had graduated from an accredited high school. (Later I discovered that if they had known that the high schools where we graduated were only ten grades, we wouldn't even have been permitted to take the examinations!)

As graduation neared Walter had found spots for both of us: two groups of churches in Tuscaloosa Presbytery where we could preach as "stated supply" ministers while going to school at the University of Alabama. So off we went from Columbia's joys to work and more study.

During that first summer I learned (from my landlady's granddaughter) the game of bridge, and got pretty well acquainted with the field. I think I did best at Mount Olivet, the weakest and usually most neglected, where I managed to stir up some interest. Among other things we had an old singer come in and teach a week's singing school, solfeggio, ending with a water-melon cutting.

At Reform a previous arrangement had been made for a union revival service, led by an evangelist who reminded me a little of John W. Tyndale. His specialty was threatening the unsaved with Hell, telling horrendous tales of men on whom he had urged that "this might be their last chance," and who died that night or next day. "And I pray: 'O Lord, I ~~can~~'t go on unless you stop these terrible tragedies from following me.'" But his tactics didn't seem to be getting much result.

Walter and I got our transfer arranged, and worked out a schedule by which we could graduate in two years. We had our freshman English under Carl Carmer, with whom I became close in later years, also a verse-writing course under him. We also became very good at "block" dominoes, a game far superior to the popular "muggins," where most of the scoring is done by having terminal chips add up to multiples of five.

At the end of our first year Walter's job was continued, while I -- for no reason I was ever able to learn -- ~~was~~ fired. I thought, and still think I had done a pretty good job.

I began trying desperately to find another church job. I preached for a week at Leakesville, in the extreme southeast corner of Mississippi, in hopes of being able to finish college

at Hattiesburg State Normal School (now University of Southern Mississippi) or across the line at Springhill, in Mobile. I seemed to be well liked, but missed being called by one vote.

Next I started west from Carrollton, more or less aimlessly, and at Vaiden. Miss., bumped into a middle-class summer preacher named Lovell. He said he'd decided to quit the job (I think to go back to being a chiropractor) and suggested I fill in for a while. It worked out beautifully, and I was called as pastor. The three churches, Shongalo, Blackmonton and Salem, were all weak, but were aided by \$600 a year by Central Mississippi Presbytery.

Shongalo was the name of an old town where the church had been organized, about 1840. When the railroad missed it by two miles, a decade later, town and church moved to the present site.

Vaiden was a pleasant spot in many respects. One of my deacons, Tom Noah, raised the best watermelons I ever tasted. Shortly after I reached the town some young people took me out to a farm with a fine fishing lake, where I met Claudyne Heggie, a head-strong girl just home from her sophomore year at Mississippi State College for Women. Deena and I were involved in a love affair that lasted for two decades and through two of her marriages. We always planned to marry, but something always intervened.

Most of the people were civilized if not cultured, but there were incidents

Staying overnight at the home of one of my very prosperous members, I found myself besieged by bedbugs -- the most and hungriest I have ever seen. I had to get up and light the kerosene lamp to discourage them enough that I could get any sleep. Maybe someone was awake and guessed from the light, for later they

Another could have been more serious. During the early fall of my second year we were holding a meeting one night at Salem, when a bunch of toughs from nearby Blackhawk created a hubbub outside that continued until I threatened to report them to the next grand jury. I thought it was all forgotten until they showed up at Tom Noah's annual Easter afternoon egg hunt in the woods down the hill from his house. As it was breaking up at dusk, they showed up, dressed up as if joining the hunt, and waited for me at a small clearing half way up the hill, saying they wanted to talk to me.

I made no objection, since our crowd had some capable fighters and I was sure they would sense the situation and join us. But not one of them did: all my friends trooped up the hill laughing and talking, leaving me alone with the visitors. Then their spokesman said they had heard I was going to bring charges before the grand jury. I had really forgotten all about the matter till they showed up. I knew I was in for a beating, but I wasn't going down with my tail between my legs. So, I bristled right back. I told them what they had done was a very serious thing, and I wasn't going to stand for it. Then a singular thing happened. I've never known whether it was fear of the law or perhaps they figured I wouldn't have dared unless I was carrying a pistol, which I was known to do frequently, though not that day. In any case they broke down, almost wept, and began to beg. They were very sorry. One was the only support of a widowed mother, and so on. At first I played tough, but not for long. Even a rat will fight when he's cornered. So, without too much convincing

I told them that since they were truly sorry and I was sure they'd never do it again, I was ready to forgive and forget. We all shook hands on it and walked out of the woods the best of friends. I never told any of my young men how badly disappointed I was at their leaving me in such a difficult spot. Maybe they knew what was going on, and just wondered if I'd have to cry for help.

Walter finished up at Alabama, getting his B. A. degree, and at the end of a year moved over to preach at Calhoun City, Toccoola and some other spot in North Mississippi Presbytery. I arranged to spend the next winter at Oxford, finishing up my college work at the University of Mississippi, driving home on weekends to preach.

I had a good year at Ole Miss, taking courses in drama and English novel under Leonard DeLong Wallace, a shell-shocked veteran no one else could understand, but one of the best I ever had, and folklore under Hudson, a leader in the field; also astronomy, German, Greek Literature and Virgil, of which I remember little except the famous line: "Perhaps this too may some day be pleasant to remember," and that a vowel followed by a mute and a liquid is short, instead of long.

But I had some trouble with R. Malcolm Guess, the YMCA director and would-be campus censor, who was known to act as a stool pigeon and got some students thrown out for minor offenses. A few friends and I organized -- no, formed -- a group we called the Bolsheviks (ah, if Senator McCarthy had only known that years later!) with the

rallying cry of, "This is the sphenoid bone!" borrowed from a story about ~~the~~ the poet Oliver Wendell Holmes. When this rang out because one of us might be in a jam, or even just lonesome, if any other was in hearing distance you'd hear the reply: "Damn the sphenoid bone!" (The comment of Holmes, who was a professor of Medicine at ^VHarvard.)

We pulled off one good one. Oxford police were giving any student a hard time if they caught him in town after 10 p. m., and we resented it. It happened that at that time Gov. Theodore G. Bilbo was carrying on a campaign to move the University to Jackson. So, one day we put up posters calling for a mass meeting at midnight on the courthouse steps to discuss University removal. Not many showed up, but enough that after we had made speeches (all in favor of removal) for an hour or so, the police told us to disperse. No, we told them, we were holding a mass meeting.

~~They~~ took us to the police station, where the chief told us the same thing and got the same answer. He called the university president, who refused to interfere, after being told we were orderly. This, as we had planned, put the chief in a spot. He knew ~~as we~~ ~~had planned~~ that if he arrested us we'd immediately call in the news to all the newspapers. Headlines of "University students arrested for discussing removal to Jackson" would be a trump card for Bilbo. We even told what we planned. Finally the chief broke down and began to beg: "Why are you trying to cause trouble for me?" We told him the real reason, and he willingly promised that no more students would be harrassed. We all shook hands and went back to the campus singing the Soldiers' Chorus from Faust. No ~~more~~ ^{more} students were persecuted that year, at least.

Soon after arriving at Vaiden I met the most courageous and remarkable man I ever knew, Fred Smith. Crippled at 18 by arthritis, he struggled against fate. For a while he taught a village school, and when I met him he was clerk of courts, with only a helper to hand him down the heavy books, although he was confined to a wheel chair. No one looked on him with pity. He was the friendly advisor and confidante of everyone in town. I quickly became almost a member of the family, which included a sister and an attorney brother-in-law, their three year old daughter, and any unattached relatives, from time to time. It was one place I could always go when I had no other good one. Defeated for reelection after serving as court clerk for 16 years (he had been blind for five of these from arthritic cataract) he rented a vacant store, borrowed \$1000 and began selling

furniture, with only one employe, a black man whose principal job was to fetch and carry and move the pieces of furniture and other things Fred sold. Fred's memory and sense of hearing were so keen that he could recognize from just a "Hello, Mr. Fred," almost anyone who came in from a radius of fifteen miles, and call the visitor by name. He paid off his debt and was able to stock the store within a year, and continued in business, and still the friendly confidant until just before his death at over 70.

In spite of Guess, who tried everything he could to get me thrown out of school, I made the honor roll and graduated. I might have married Deena and settled down as a preacher, but at the end of the year I was notified by the "czar" of the presbytery that it was cutting off the \$600 appropriation. I'd been having trouble with him before, including the time he demanded on the floor of Presbytery that I wear a hat when outdoors. I refused, citing Paul as my authority. The czar was a bossy old coot, with his nose into everything. He had driven many good men out for disagreeing with him, and all the other preachers were very much afraid of him.

Just at this time Walter, who had been stirring up things, came up with a solution. Auburn (N. Y.) Seminary, now merged with Union Theological Seminary in New York, offered us both full graduate fellowships to work for M. Th. degrees in Semitics and Old Testament. Because we had become college graduates our B. D. ~~Degrees~~ had been awarded by Columbia that spring. I was very happy to notify the old czar that I no longer needed the \$600 a year. It held, anyway, till September, and by then we were off and away.

Chapter Two -- Bama and Ole Miss

Walter and I had been sharing everything equally ever since we started to Columbia, so it was very ~~use~~ convenient that we both found work in the same area and in reach of the same school. We didn't always consult about spending, but we felt free to draw checks on one another's bank accounts if need be -- always, of course, letting one another know.

We had passed our examination for licensing in Congaree Presbytery before leaving Columbia; I became pastor of two small-town churches, Carrollton (a county seat) and Reform, about 35 and 25 miles, respectively, west of Tuscaloosa, and two small country churches. Because one of these had no elders, I was ordained at once, and given powers to receive members without a "session", or church board. Walter's was a little farther away, to the south, with churches at Epes, Emmelle, and Gainesville. Because we both needed autos we took out bank loans; he bought a new Model T. Ford roadster for about \$525, and I a used Model T coupe for \$400. Both proved satisfactory for years. We spent the week at school during its sessions, and drove back and forth to preach on weekends. We occasionally swapped sermons, and I think I gained on these exchanges; he was better at homiletics than I.

I had my first wedding and first funeral during my first weeks at Carrollton; the wedding was an elopement from Birmingham, the funeral a child who fell while playing on a pile of lumber. I'm afraid I didn't do too well on that one, but I did my best.

Chapter Three -- Auburn

During 1927 both Walter and I had traded in our Fords for Chevrolet coupes. Needing only one car for the trip, I traded mine in on a newer one to be taken later, and we set out for New York in Walter's, which was slightly newer. Auburn Seminary -- later merged with Union Theological Seminary in New York City, was located at that time in Auburn, New York, about 24 miles west of Syracuse on the old U.S. 20.

We started in early September in beautiful weather, and had an uneventful trip except for getting caught in a speed trap in Kentucky. We hadn't seen either a town or a speed limit sign, but the man with the siren and a gun took \$10 from us -- the equivalent of more than \$100 today. We knew he was a liar, because as he was finishing up with us he shot at and stopped a southbound car which hadn't even reached the place he told us the town limits ended. But he had the gun.

School was about ready to open when we reached Auburn, and we were assigned a nice three-room suite -- two small bedrooms and a study. We also found the faculty very cooperative, especially Dr. William John Hinke, who put on extra courses in Assyrian, Arabic, Biblical Aramaic and advanced Hebrew, especially for us, and Dr. Harlan Creelman added one in the Hebrew prophets. There were several Japanese students, whom we found congenial, especially one named Oguri, who had such a sense of humor that we dubbed him the Japanese Irishman.

Auburn was a beautiful spot, with old stone buildings scattered over several acres, and including a playground lorded over

by a student named Durbin, who was top dog in every sport. The one going at that time was soccer, which we had never played, or even seen, but we went out, and were picked on the under-dog team. We didn't cover ourselves with glory, but did get in a few kicks, and as luck would have it, Walter got the only goal of the match. But we soon found ourselves too busy for sports.

The town of Auburn was interesting, situated at the north end of Owasco Lake, one of the Finger Lakes. It had a ^{stone} Presbyterian church with the ugliest imaginable steeple, (years later destroyed by lightning), and a gem of an Episcopal church (St. Peter's), with what I still consider the most exquisite wood carving in America. There was also a state prison, garnished with a copper Union Soldier statue, erected on a high pillar, like a St. Simon Stylites, when Confederate prisoners were housed there during the Civil War, and commonly referred to as "Copper Johnny."

Being outsiders, we didn't get much preferment for the supply preaching jobs, but Walter soon got one at a church north of Oneida Lake, driving up maybe 35 miles, in the car. Not long afterward, on a Saturday afternoon, I noticed two men wandering about, and offered to help them. As I had guessed, they were looking for a pulpit supply for their beautiful old Dutch Reformed church at Owasco Village, about eight miles away. I explained that the seminary office was closed, but if they wished, I'd be glad to supply till they could do better. I preached there every Sunday till I was ready to leave Auburn, going down to the church by a trolley line. Supply jobs didn't pay much, but with our fellowships to cover room, board and fees we did all right, and were able to have Mother come up and stay in a boarding house.

We got a lucky break when Dr. Hinke was searching for a student who could operate a slide projector for a speaker at a club attended by faculty members and similar folk. I had gained some experience the previous year at Ole Miss, projecting slides and pictures for "Wild Bill" Kennon's first and second year astronomy courses. (I took both simultaneously and passed both.) I volunteered for Hinkey, with the result that Walter and I (for some reason nobody questioned my bringing him along) got to attend all the meetings and hear some excellent lectures on archaeology and the classics. One of the members was Dr. A. W. Dulles (we were taking his ethics class and it was the dullest ever) and we had occasion to meet his sons, Allen and John W. Dulles, who rose high in the government.

Oguri quickly dropped out of school to go somewhere else, but Dr. Hinke continued teaching all those extra languages just for us. He gave the most horrific assignments and we dared not ^{fail to} complete them, so we learned unbelievably fast.

We made one fast friend, B. (for Bedford) Forrest Bond, who had grown up as a Seventh Day Baptist and attended Alfred University (then a religious school) and had a year at San Francisco Seminary. He later became an Episcopal priest. He was an only child, and his mother used to send him scads of the world's best sugar cookies, which he shared with us. They came in handy, for the mess hall food wasn't as good as that at Columbia. On cold nights the three of us used to walk down a little way to a diner, and have cocoa and saltines.

As the year's work drew to a close we were busy figuring out where to go next. I was offered a call as pastor of the Owasco church, and old Dr. Schmidt, the sole professor of Semitic Languages at Cornell, offered me a position teaching first-year Hebrew and Arabic and working out my Ph. D. I was also offered a fellowship by the Harvard Divinity School. But neither offered the broad range of languages in our field we found at Hartford Seminary Foundation, allied with Yale, in Connecticut, so we accepted fellowships there. Meantime we got summer preaching jobs in Canada, where a sharply divided church union had left a great many continuing Presbyterian churches without pastors.

Walter's thesis at Auburn was on the Blessing of Jacob, Genesis 49:2-27, mine on the Song of Deborah, Judges 5. Maybe they weren't earthshaking, but we got our M. Th. degrees. On Mother's Day we took Mother to lunch at The Krebs at nearby Skaneateles, then one of America's most famous eateries, and next day put her on a train for Atlanta. Then we took off for Canada.

Walter was to preach at a group of churches near the north coast of Nova Scotia, I at Harcourt, in New Brunswick. Mine provided a horse and buggy, his a Ford, so I took our car instead. The summer was pleasant, and I never ate so many lobsters in all my life. And after four months we met at Chatham, N. B., and drove back down through Maine and Massachusetts and Rhode Island to Hartford.

Chapter Four -- Hartford

Hartford had a beautiful campus, good dormitories and mess hall, and mostly agreeable students. But best of all for us was our faculty advisor, Dr. Lewis Bayles Paton, a great scholar and a true friend. We were the answer to his prayer, and, as it turned out, his last hope.

We had planned to major in Arabic or Assyrian, but he had a far better suggestion. "Most of the known Assyrio-Babylonian inscriptions have been deciphered," he reminded us, "and there are many competent Arabists. If you pick out some obscure Arabic text and work on it, there is no certainty that someone else ^{not} _A may publish it just before you're ready, and you'll have all the work to do over again."

He had a much better suggestion; After the French gave up digging at the beginning of the World War in 1914, Arabs had dug ^{Sumerian} illicitly and found two great/temple libraries, at Drehem and Umma, some 24,000 tablets in all. They had bootlegged them out of Iraq to London, Paris and Berlin, where they landed in museums, and a fourth of them to New York, where they were divided between Yale and Hartford. And during the ensuing eight years or so he had never had any Ph. D. candidates to work on them. If we wanted to decipher some of them, nobody could beat us to it.

We hadn't had any Sumerian, but ~~we~~ Dr. Hinke had drilled us well in Assyrian, which had adopted the earlier Sumerian style of writing.

We grabbed at the chance. He would teach us Sumerian (so far as it was then known) and we would take it from there. The tablets were mostly from the reigns of Dungi, Bur Sin, Gimil Sin and Ibil Sin, of the Third Dynasty of Ur, around 2000 B. C. He suggested that Walter work with tablets from the reign of Bur Sin, about 2015-2005 B. C., and I with those of his successor, Gimil Sin, 2005-1995 B. C. When we asked how many tablets each should decipher, he said: "Let's say one hundred." I'm sure he expected us to demur, and he would reduce the number, but after our experience with Dr. Hinke we didn't dare question an assignment. Only later did we learn that two years earlier Columbia University had given a guy named Nisbet a Ph. D. with high honors for deciphering 23, mostly easy ones.

Besides Sumerian (although as final year candidates we had no course requirements) we also scheduled Arabic and Syriac, and because the rules required a reading knowledge of Latin, French and German we signed up for French, which we had never taken. We didn't learn much in that class, but some of the books we were using in our Sumerian study were in French, we quickly picked up a reading knowledge of that language.

When our program was presented to the faculty, Dr. Paton told us, the general consensus was for rejection, on the ground that we couldn't finish it in a year. "I don't believe they can finish it in a year," he argued, "but what's the harm in letting them try?" He won, and we were given our chance.

Then came a hazard. Only a few weeks into our work Dr. Paton, the only professor who knew any Sumerian, landed in the hospital for an operation for prostate cancer, and was never able to come out again. He died the following summer.

So there we were with three thousand tablets and the library's half a dozen books on Sumerian, to work out our own salvation. The tablets were neatly arranged on shelves in a room next to Dr. Paton's office, all in separate cushioned boxes, but without a hint as to their language, content, meaning or date.

Before landing in the hospital Dr. Paton had shown us where to find the dating formula, usually but not always written on the edge of the tablet: the day, month, and the year designation, which might be something like "Mu Gimil Sin lugal," (the year Gimil Sin became king), or perhaps "the year the wall Mur-Ik Tid-nim was built."

That was fine, but where could we find a list of the dating formulas for the 106 years of the Third Dynasty of Ur? Unfortunately there was none. Here and there in our books in German, French, Swedish, Latin and English an author would have worked out a date formula or two. So Walter and I put our heads to it and worked out the first complete list of dating formulas for the Dynasty. Try to tell me now that this feat, consigned to a card file, wasn't worth a Ph. D. in anybody's university! But we were still green, and it never occurred to us to suggest it. Then we went to work and catalogued all 3000 tablets. Wasn't that worth a Ph. D.? Again it never occurred to us.

All that remained was to pick out a hundred tablets from the proper reigns and decipher them. But by this time we had read and wrestled with so many tablets that the rest was duck soup. In fact it was so easy we could hardly believe anyone would give us a Ph. D. for it. So instead of picking out easy tablets as Nisbet had done (only about four or five of his were difficult), we searched for and deciphered the most difficult.

Life at Hartford was pleasant, but finances were often a problem. The fellowships paid a little more than at Auburn, but we found almost no preaching jobs. The conservative Congregationalists looked on Presbyterians as dangerously near heresy. And about a century earlier in an aborted plan for unity, all New England Presbyterian churches had been dismissed to Congregational groups, while all New York Congregational churches had become Presbyterian. Walter got a now-and-then job chauffeuring a rich and very old lady (she really was one) around the countryside and to see her friends and some shows. During the Christmas vacation we got jobs in the directory department of the Post Office, which in those days made a real effort to get the mail delivered. But our best source of income was from shoveling and scraping snow from the many walks in and around the large seminary area. We spent so much time on this that some of our not too close friends kidded that we were working for a Ph. D. in snow shoveling.

By going without dinner one Sunday when the mess hall was closed, we enjoyed what I still feel was the greatest musical treat of my life, standing room tickets to a concert by Fritz Kreisler. At Columbia, several churches had fine choirs and gave cantatas and similar events on Sunday nights. Much the same at Alabama, where we also got to see a traveling Bavarian Passion Play, and at Auburn a Paul Whiteman concert. But nothing before or since matched that Kreisler concert.

It happened to fall on the thirtieth anniversary of his first, when he was young and little known, but well received. An alert

music critic had reminded him of this, and he was in a grand good humor, playing brilliantly, even for him. The audience loved it, and received him warmly. At the end of the concert he played encore after encore, but the crowd wouldn't let him go, though each time he pretended not to know just what was wanted. He knew, and after the fourth or fifth encore he came back, shrugged and smiling broadly began playing his very popular Caprice Viennois. The house was almost shaken down with cheers.

Towards spring I got a job at \$10 a week teaching a Sunday School class of boys at the big Asylum Hill Congregational Church. Another student handed me the job, saying the boys were so unruly he just couldn't cope with the situation. Part of the problem was that these were the sons of the most prominent and richest members of the church, who wouldn't appreciate having their darlings disciplined or sent home.

Fortunately for me (and perhaps for the boys) they were studying the book of Judges, and had reached the story of Gideon. I quickly spotted the chief troublemaker and appointed him to keep order. Then I launched into the study in its obvious meaning, without all the holy moralizing and flubdub. The boys had never thought of the Bible in such a way, and were fascinated. Disregarding the course, I carried them along through the history of Israel. For the final public meeting I wrote them a play on Jehu (*Jehu the son of Nimshi, who driveth furiously.*) It was a triumph and my boys covered themselves with glory. I've often wondered what the future held in store for that delightful bunch.

We finally sweated out the year, finished our dissertations (I wrote much of mine in the dormitory reception room, with one ear cocked to the radio, whose purchase we had promoted in the fall) and taken our orals. With Paton very ill they had to borrow a Yale professor for the Sumerian and to evaluate the dissertations.

With Paton so ill, things were a bit unsettled for us, and nobody ever told us whether we had made it or not, but we signed the cap and gown list and hoped. On graduation day there was a long list of degree candidates, and awards were made "minori praetori," least first. They began with the School of Religious Education, bachelors, masters and doctors, then the same with the Kennedy School of Missions, and finally came to the Seminary. Besides all the minor degrees, there were 13 of us Ph. D. candidates, in alphabetical order, and we were the last except a Chinese name Zi.

Everything had gone smoothly through the first ten, but when my turn came Dean Rockwell Harmon Potter looked at his list, frowned and went over to speak to Dr. Mackenzie, the president. My heart dropped: I had had it. But then he came back to the podium and started with my list of attainments, but as I came forward he said, "And lest they should be divided even in this, I present to you" and gave Walter's list, and our degrees were awarded simultaneously. I hadn't thought the old coot had so much poetry in him!

Right after lunch we started south with barely enough, we hoped, to make it to Alabama. We stoped at Paintsville, KY, to see our grandfather, Jesse Stafford Sr. From long habit he asked us if we needed money. But not wanting to join the list of those who came with outstretched hands, we lied like gentlemen and said we had plenty.

Chapter Five -- Back to Bama

That ended our joint college years. We found shelter with a friendly Methodist preacher. Walter picked up a little supply job near Demopolis, later became a p^{as}tor in Memphis Presbytery, and then went to Brazil for a lot of years as head of a missionary college.

As with Andrew Carnegie, most of my breaks, good and bad, have come through sheer chance. The church at Uniontown, one of the best in Tuscaloosa Presbytery, was vacant, and when one of the candidates notified them he wouldn't show up, somehow I was asked to supply that Sunday. The congregation was delighted, cancelled all but one of the other visits, let me move into the manse, lent me an auto, and gave me a call as pastor. It was a delightful spot, liberal minded and with good music. But during the fall I discovered that Deena, who had married in haste after our first quarrel, during my winter at Hartford, was very unhappy.

That shook me up and to soothe my feelings I arranged during my second year at Uniontown to take some courses at Alabama. It was 61 miles, but with the agreement of the session I arranged to take courses in French, third-year German, ^{something else} and Shakespeare, which all met on Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings from 8:30 to 12:30. The following year I was offered a job at starvation wages (all poor Bama could pay in the Depression) teaching three classes of Freshman English. (Later they added one in Beginner's German.) So I resigned my Uniontown job and became a professor. I was also

permitted to take courses without fees in Anglo Saxon, Middle English (Chaucer), and one or two more. Both ways the work was delightful, in spite of the hard times. At least two of my English students became nationally known. But at the end of the year the school was so broke that they had to lay off about thirty faculty members. This was done, of course, in reverse order from their hiring, and I was one of the casualties. At the moment there didn't seem to be anything much to do but become a hobo.

EPILOG -- 1990

Here it is nearly seventy years since these things occurred, ~~##~~ and 38 since a good deal of this was written. Only two of us now survive, Walter and I. Father died ^{in Kentucky} in 1940 and Mother three years later in Georgia; Ernest spent 58 happy years preaching in the North Georgia Methodist Conference; Shirley and Owen went to Japan as faith missionaries, and after World War II continued that work in Hawaii till she was almost 80; Walter headed a missionary college in Brazil, and still preaches in the South; ^Ipreached, was an English teacher at 'Bama, hoboed for three years and finally found my niche as a journalist and author in Pittsburgh.

This year, when Walter's Kit and my Ruth died of heart attacks within three months, he suggested we take an auto trip back through time to see the places where we had lived as boys. It seemed an excellent idea.

So, in early May I flew down to Memphis. Walter, defying his nearly 90 years, drove the more than 800 miles from his home in Texas, and met me at the airport.

That afternoon we drove over to Saulsbury; which, although greatly changed, proved to be one of the most interesting spots on our itinerary. After 77 years, of course, none of our friends remained, but two people who had come to the town more than 45 years ago could help us identify some places: John Dowdy's store, later run by Uriel Daniel, Father's favorite high school pupil; the place where the school had been; the cemetery; our first house (where I had my first asthma attack); Dr. Goddard's house, and the two churches, the Baptist refaced with brick.

We drove the six miles over to Grand Junction, where the Southern and Illinois Central used to cross at grade. The crossing had been modernized, and the once busy station stood empty, but the tombstone factory where Father had taken us to see the operation was still there, though not working that day.

Next day we drove across Tennessee to Trenton, Georgia, almost in Tennessee and almost in Alabama. Our nephew, Bill Svetnam, had arranged for us to contact one of his cousins, who kindly drove us around to the spots, mostly gone. The courthouse was still there, as was the (now unused) station. The school had burned; our house was gone and forgotten, and the fine sulphur spring had been covered by construction. John L. Case's store was still there, now Case Hardware, run by his great-grandson. The old Presbyterian church was gone, the Methodist burned and replaced by a new one; the Baptist church remained, and there were now a Church of Christ and a Church of God. Trenton was about the only place that had grown (a little) or not shrunk through the years. We asked about Pittsburg, or Durham, where we spent a summer on Lookout Mountain. The mine was worked out, the village gone and the post office closed.

Next morning we drove from Chattanooga to Dawsonville on good roads -- a beautiful drive. The town, once almost inaccessible, is now close to a state park. The old courthouse is being renovated inside. There is a diner and Sluder's house and the schoolhouse are gone. Surprisingly, there is still a weekly paper with the same name, the Dawson County Advertiser. Not remembering who ran it in 1913, we didn't go in.

Going from Athens to Bishop we could see through some brush the place where we used to go fishing in the Oconee River. In Bishop the railroad seemed unchanged, but the station where so many coffins were brought in during the flu epidemic was gone. The Methodist and Baptist churches were still as before, but the school was gone without a trace, as was our house. Dolph Adams' old garage was still there, but empty. Judge Norville's field where we had picked cotton was now used for growing hay.

Crossing the Apalachachee River as we had in moving in 1919, we found Bostwick in the same place, but shrunken. Bostwick Supply Store still had the name "B. H. Malcolm," but looked pretty seedy. The garage where I remembered seeing men torturing a dog was empty. The Methodist Church had been coated with brick, but it and the Baptist still stood near the cemetery and the ball field. A new school had been built but was now a community center.

One person who might have remembered us remained: Coy Ruark, about Walter's age and still active, lived on a side street, but proved to be away from home.

Jenkinsburg proved almost non-existent, except for the Methodist and Baptist churches, and a house that looked like, but probably wasn't where we had lived. A new brick school had been built and later used as a nursing home, but now stood vacant. The stores were gone. The wild azaleas were still in the woods, but the blooming season was almost over. The station and post office were gone, and the only business was a little new shabbily built store just below the edge of town.

Epilog 4

After an overnight visit in Griffin, GA, with relatives, we moved on to Whitesburg, the last of our boyhood homes, and found more of it recognizable than at most places. The railroad station stood empty, but the Baptist church across the highway seemed little changed. The building that once housed Watkins' store and Camp's drug store and the post office now stood empty. Our house was gone and a newer school had replaced the one we knew. Beyond it Christian church we had helped build stood shabby and deserted, but one Watkins house and Quin Ansley's (for whom we had chopped cotton and stripped cane were little changed.

The Methodist church had been given a brick face, and old Mr. Brantley's house still stood beside the road to Jones' mill, where we used to swim. The mill was gone and the dam breached, but we got a drink from the cold spring nearby.

One person we had known was living on a farm nearby, but we got mixed up on road directions and couldn't find his house. We still*had a long drive ahead, so we gave it up and went on to ^{Murphersboro} McMinnville, Tenn., for the night.

Bethesda, twenty miles away, where we had first attended a Presbyterian church, was hard to find, but better. Walter had written the pastor there, and he had told some people. An elder, the son of Walter's classmate, Howard Bond, and he was at the church early. He now owns the house where we lived, and took us there. It is empty, but well kept, and I was amazed at its beautiful stairway. The great ~~33~~ beech trees still stand in the yard.

The church was little changed, and the sermon surprisingly good. Walter remembered two octogenarian women as schoolmates.

They invited us to stay for (noon) dinner, but we pressed on and before dark reached Salyersville, Ky., where our grandmother, Serena Patrick Svetnan, had been born.

Next day we drove to Staffordville. Our grandfather Stafford's house had been moved and changed. Only parts of the dam at his mill remained. His later home in nearby Paintsville is also gone. We drove to Blaine by Mud Lick, where only the Volga post office remains; but at Blaine we found the little house our parents built soon after they were married, now occupied by the widow of our only cousin remaining there.

Walter thought he could walk up the tremendous hill to the family cemetery, reached only by trail. I didn't think I could, but started, and we both made it. The cousin, who is buried there, had enclosed the burying ground with a chain link fence, and his widow keeps it well maintained. Our great-grandmother, both grandparents, Father and our infant sister Jessie are among those who lie there.

After lunch with our hostess we drove on the West Liberty, where we found nothing recognizable but a church built while we lived there. Our home was gone, its space taken by a riverfront park.

That ended our sentimental journey except for stops at Richmond and Hopkinsville to see Stafford cousins, one an eccentric who thinks she has traced her lineage back to the Dukes of Buckingham, William the Conqueror and Charlemagne. It was a delightful excursion, but we found that -- just as you can't step in the same river twice -- you can never go home again.